



## Small Comdex, But Big for Palm Power

**Report** By Dave Johnson

By now you've heard the reports: Comdex was smaller than ever. In years past, attendees flowed through the streets of Vegas like a river of computer geeks and commandeered the entire town. This year, thanks in part to the total absence of vendors at the Sands Convention Center and more low-key attendance figures (estimated by the shows organizers at about 125,000, but even that seemed an exaggeration), the town barely seemed to notice the show.

Despite this, Palm made a large showing. Indeed, Palm, Handspring, and Sony pavilions were, thanks to their size and proximity to each other, a measurable fraction of the overall floor space in the show's main hall. Handspring was the center of attention thanks to its forthcoming Treo -- the only genuinely new Palm hardware on display at the show, with the exception of Sony's PEG-T415, a \$300 Clie that includes an enhanced IR port for double duty as a universal remote control. Nonetheless, smartphones were very hot product this year, and the Treo seemed to be a huge hit. The Treo, of course, integrates a GSM mobile phone with the Palm OS. Unlike the innovative but flawed VisorPhone, the Treo looks smart, compact, and highly usable. Even the traditionally sacrosanct Graffiti area has been replaced by a small keyboard, making it easy to use the device one handed (a Graffiti version is also available). Since the device includes a generous 16MB of RAM and a color version will ship in the summer, the Treo arguably represents the current summit of Palm OS technology.

Well over two dozen vendors filled the Palm pavilion, and the show's new emphasis on mobile technology put many of these vendors in the lime-

light. Several Palm partners were even named finalists in the Best of COMDEX competition. Cutting Edge Software's QuickOffice Conference got just such a boost. QuickOffice Conference lets multiple users collaborate wirelessly on the same QuickSheet document, a first for any PDA. Trust Digital was also named a Best of COMDEX finalist for their PDASecure application, a program that helps corporations protect data stored on Palm devices through password protection, multiple levels of data encryption and a wealth of administrative control features.

Elsewhere on the show floor, a handful of Bluetooth vendors filled their own pavilion. While this wireless networking standard has been on the fringes for several years now, the pavilion still offered little more than a handful of developers offering embedded protocol stacks and custom APIs -- stuff no one but other Bluetooth developers could possibly care about. But back in the Handspring Pavilion, Red M demonstrated a real, working three-way Bluetooth connection between an Ericsson phone, a Handspring Visor with their Blade Bluetooth module, and a Bluetooth headset. It was encouraging to finally see something actually work -- the Red M rep simply tapped a contact on the Visor which wirelessly dialed the phone, then talked on the headset though the phone was a dozen feet away. The Blade module even made it possible to surf the Web without a physical connection to the phone. That was cool- and it's all available now.

There's no argument that Comdex was a mere shadow of its former self. But that doesn't appear to have affected Palm vendors, who may have had their best year yet.

### SupplyNet Cell Phone Cables

**\$39-up** SupplyNet  
[www.thesupplynet.com](http://www.thesupplynet.com)

Most cell phones based on CDMA and GSM standards can be connected to your handheld's HotSync port, where they'll work as modems at speeds ranging from 9.6K to 19.2k bps.

While there are a number of companies offering cellular connection cables for Palm Powered handhelds, we haven't found any that offer the sheer selection of Supplynet. For instance, at press time the company offered 38 different cables for Handspring Visors; most of these cables support three to six different cell phone models. You'll find support for Palm, Handera, Sony, and Kyocera handhelds, and phones from Motorola, iDEN, Nokia, Samsung,

Sanyo, Audiovox, LG, and others.

We tested cables for connecting the Clie and Palm Universal Connector (m125/m500/m505) to a Motorola Startac. The cable is solidly built, with connectors that secure firmly to each device. They're not overly long at 12 inches; the compact length is an advantage when you're cramming the cable into your jacket pocket.

SupplyNet includes instructions in the package for setting up your handheld with a variety of cellular providers. These are a bit on the pricey side for cables, but compared to the cost of a dedicated wireless add-on, they're a cost-effective investment. --Denny Atkin



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### News

#### MyPalm Portal Closing

We've been a big proponent of Palm's free MyPalm portal ([my.palm.com](http://my.palm.com)), which allowed handheld users to access and update their PIM data online. But Heinlein was right: there ain't no such thing as a free lunch. In late November, Palm announced the portal service would be shutting down on January 10. The site will still exist for users of the Palm VII series handhelds, who'll still be able to use it to access their web email and Palm.Net accounts. Palm says the MyPalm mobile portal that's actually accessed directly on Palm Powered handhelds will still be accessible, and that the company planned to offer additional web tools on the handheld portal.

#### Dragonball Gets MPEG4

In 2002 Palm and its licensees are expected to start shipping new handhelds based on the ARM CPU chip. In a bid to make its own licensed ARM CPU the attractive choice, Motorola has licensed an MPEG4 video codec from Finnish company Hantro. This move will allow its upcoming Dragonball MX1 to support full-motion video, even over a wireless connection.

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### New Products

#### Big-Name Games

Serious Sam, JetFighter, Austin Powers Pinball, and Grand Theft Auto... A collection of your favorite PC games? Nope, Global Star Software has ported these classic game titles to the Palm OS. While Serious Sam isn't going to provide 60 frames-per-second shooter action on a Palm Powered handheld, it's still great to see some well-known games on the platform. Even if JetFighter was our favorite game of, well, 1990... Now, where's the port of Civilization? [www.globalstarsoftware.com](http://www.globalstarsoftware.com)